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Date:	Tue, 7/17/2012 7:13:18 PM
Subject:	FW: עוד כתבה של ג׳פרי גולד ברג שיעשה רעש

לשר שלום,

לעיונך.

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http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-07-16/is-obama-or-romney-better-for-middle-east-peace-.html

Is Obama or Romney Better for Middle East Peace?

By Jeffrey Goldberg

Which candidate for U.S. president is better positioned to jump-start Middle East peace negotiations? If you guessed the one who already has a Nobel Peace Prize on his shelf, you guessed wrong.

Which candidate is better prepared to confront Iran militarily? If you guessed the Republican with an aviary of national-security hawks working on his campaign, well, wrong again.

But let me explain.

President Barack Obama came to office in 2009 with fixed ideas about how to revive peace negotiations. Despite the caricature drawn by his opponents, he was not unsympathetic to Israel and its security dilemmas -- particularly the challenge posed by Iran's nuclear ambitions. But he also believed that his predecessor, George W. Bush, had spent too much time coddling the Israeli government, rather than challenging it to compromise with the Palestinians.

Obama thought that an Israeli commitment to freezing the expansion of Jewish settlements on the West Bank would breathe new life into the peace process, and he

said so publicly. Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, whose governing coalition includes ideologues almost pathologically committed to the cause of settlement, didn't much appreciate Obama's demand, and he gave in only partially and temporarily. All this was happening against the backdrop of Obama's famous visit to Cairo, where he delivered a message of reconciliation to the Arab world and then neglected to stop in next door to tell the Israelis that he hadn't forgotten them.

No Plan B

Obama had no Plan B when Netanyahu didn't do what he wanted. He didn't punish Netanyahu, he didn't cajole him, and he didn't present alternative formulas for negotiations. His resentment of Netanyahu deepened, a feeling that was reciprocated in earnest.

So the president, early in his term, was left with an Israeli leader who mistrusted him and a Palestinian leader, Mahmoud Abbas, who felt betrayed by the American inability to move the Israelis. Abbas, who had previously negotiated with the Israelis without benefit of a settlement freeze, thought he couldn't move forward now that Obama had made a freeze a virtual precondition for talks.

There are many critics of Israel -- including many Israelis -- who hope that Obama, if re-elected, will help Abbas by making a settlement freeze a precondition not only for renewed negotiations, but also for close relations between the U.S. and Israel. The theory is simple: Israel is a client state that depends on the U.S. for arms and for diplomatic protection in places like the United Nations, where it is regularly scapegoated. If Obama demands that Netanyahu bend to his will, and backs it up with specific threats, then the Israeli prime minister will bend.

The theory is wrong, however. It is a political nonstarter -- Israel is still a popular cause among many Americans, Jewish and non-Jewish, and Congress is adamantly pro-Israel. More than that, it would cause the Israelis to harden their position, not soften it.

Please don't get me wrong: I would very much like to see the Israelis reverse their self-destructive settlement program. But even a cursory study of Israeli political behavior would tell you that a public demand from the U.S. president to evacuate territory or shutter settlements is going to paralyze Israeli leaders, and ultimately harden their stance, especially if voters believe they're being forced to do something they don't think they should do. Israeli leaders will only make dramatic concessions when they think the U.S. is standing with them shoulder-to-shoulder.

Taking Risks

Why? The Palestinians go into negotiations with the European Union, the Arab League, the UN and most of the world's news media on their side. The Israelis have only the U.S. If Israeli leaders think the American president is a fair-weather friend,

they won't take risks for peace. They'll hunker down and wait until he departs the scene.

"The lesson for an American president is that if you really want to achieve progress you have to have a partner in the government of Israel," said Robert Satloff, the executive director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "You can't create a partner through threats. Remember that it is the government of Israel that is going to be the one giving up tangible assets."

I wish Netanyahu would take unilateral steps now to reverse some of the damaging aspects of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank. But he certainly won't take these steps if he's unsure of Obama's support. If Netanyahu remains prime minister for an extended period, Romney has a better chance of resuscitating peace talks than Obama.

The depth of the friendship between Netanyahu and Romney has been exaggerated, but it's fair to say that Netanyahu thinks Romney won't sell him out if negotiations fail, so Netanyahu is more likely to bargain with Romney at his side. And negotiations have a greater chance if the Palestinians think the U.S. president won't axiomatically take their side when they make demands for Israeli concessions. Abbas offered nothing in the way of serious concessions in 2009 in part because he thought Obama would do the hard work of squeezing Israel.

All this isn't to say that negotiations would be fruitful if Romney wins the presidency. The Palestinians are weak and divided; the Arab world, increasingly Islamist in orientation, is going to be less interested in peace with Israel and more interested in confrontation; and the Israelis themselves seem less interested in compromise than ever. But there is almost no chance of progress if Obama wins re-election.

On the other hand, Netanyahu's primary concern today is the state of the Iranian nuclear program. And, as I'll argue in my next column, Obama is more likely to take military action against Iran than Romney is. If Obama loses, Netanyahu might wind up missing him quite a bit. Stay tuned.

(Jeffrey Goldberg is a Bloomberg View columnist and a national correspondent for the Atlantic. The opinions expressed are his own. This is the first in a two-part series.)